THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106
TELEPHONE: GARFIELD 1-7340

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MASTERS OF NEO-CLASSIC STYLE TO BE EXHIBITED AT CLEVELAND

Neo-classicism: Style and Motif, an exhibition of painting, sculpture, drawing and decorative arts assembled from public and private collections throughout the United States and Europe, opens September 23 at The Cleveland Museum of Art. It represents the Museum's major special exhibition effort of this year. The collection is to be shown only at Cleveland and will close November 1.

To demonstrate the influences of ancient Greece and Rome on the artistic milieu of the Neo-classic age in Europe and America (about 1750 to after 1830), the Museum assembled nearly 200 works of art representing 140 artists. In form as well as subject matter these show a fascination with the ancient past and illustrate the development of Neo-classicism through several successive, stylistic phases. A fully-illustrated catalog which includes essays by Henry H. Hawley and Remy G. Saisselin of the Museum staff accompanies the exhibition.

From the time of the Renaissance, European art had been dependent upon the classical past. Furthermore, as the 18th century matured, new discoveries about ancient art were being made by archaeologists and travelers. The Neo-classicists used these sources as the basis of the style which they developed. However, inspired by a nostalgia for the past, they attempted to reproduce more completely and accurately Greek and Roman works than had their Renaissance predecessors.

The exhibit is arranged to demonstrate the phases through which Neo-classicism passed, and its geographic variations. A number of the artists represented can be considered precursors of Neo-classicism. They worked within the old tradition which had been established during the Renaissance, but they practiced that tradition in an exceptionally restrained and controlled way. Though there was nothing strikingly new or original about their work, it did anticipate much of what was to come. Pompeo Batoni's Triumph of Venice is that kind of painting.

To the tradition employed by Batoni and his contemporaries, the early Neo-

classic artists added direct borrowings from ancient art. In some cases these consisted merely of decorative details, in others entire compositions were used. Painting showed a tendency toward flatter, more frieze-like compositions. The work of the popular French artist, Vien, is typical of early Neo-classicism.

It was Vien's pupil, Jacques Louis David, who carried this phase of Neo-classicism farthest. His mature style, exemplified by The Oath of the Horatii, consisted of adding strong light and shadow contrasts to early Neo-classicism. The result was painting which closely resembles low relief sculpture. David, like many early Neo-classic painters, chose subjects from ancient sources with serious moral overtones. The subjects which he chose had particular relevance in a France which was fast approaching the Revolution. David became identified with advanced political thinking and later became an admirer of Napoleon, creating pictures which celebrated Napoleonic triumphs.

As David brought early Neo-classicism to its culmination, another phase of the style was born. Painters moved away from the heroic, moralizing subjects which had inspired David toward ones dealing with the emotions of particular individuals. They also abandoned a sculpturesque style in favor of one which emphasized flat, linear patterns. This later phase is often termed Romantic Neo-classicism. Oedipus and the Sphinx, painted by David's most famous pupil, Ingres, is among the works reflecting this new approach.

The American colonies reached political maturity during the ascendancy of Neo-classicism. It is not surprising that the earliest artistic efforts of the new Republic should have been in that style. John Vanderlyn's painting Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos is perhaps the most famous American Neo-classic painting.

In the twentieth century, Neo-classicism has been largely misunderstood and neglected. It is hoped that this exhibition, by bringing works of art in the style to the attention of a wider public, will awaken many people to the aesthetic riches produced in this style.